

Comments on Torma's Paper

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I would like to ask a question or two about the spiritual side of Siren, or Siren as a Theosophist. As you know, after Blavatsky died, Theosophical society split into some factions. One of the largest successors was the Theosophical Society in Point Loma, San Diego. Siren belonged to this society. It was led by an American woman, Katherine Tingley (1847–1929). The society had strong connections with Sweden, from which many members moved to America to live in Point Loma. Siren also seemed to visit the Society several times. This society had connections also with Japan, for example Tingley herself visited Japan in 1895. And, when Shibusawa Eiichi and a group of industrialists called “Honorary Commercial Commissioners of Japan to the United States of America” travelled around America for three months, they visited the Point Loma Theosophical Society in 1910. This event clearly shows how highly the Japanese upper class thought of the Theosophical Society. In addition, it had a lodge in Zushi, Japan. The leader of this lodge was an Englishman, Edward Stanley Stephenson (1871–1926). He stayed in Japan from 1898 to 1922, teaching at the Naval Engineering College in Yokosuka. Stephenson took photos of temples in Kamakura and contributed articles about Japan to the Society's journal, *Theosophical Path*. It is interesting to note that he wrote a short article titled “Zen in Japan” in the *Theosophical Path* in October 1918. He wrote that Zen is a way to find the Truth within oneself through the moment when we touch nature. It is without dogmas and not limited to priests. It is a way of every people in everyday life. It is not to see nature vacantly, but “right performance of duty and a life in harmony with the Law” will bring peace and happiness in mind. Such an interpretation of Zen was a mixture of modernized Buddhism and Theosophical thoughts. He wrote the purpose of Zen was like that of Theosophical education, namely to let students find his or her own genius within. My question is whether Siren's understanding of Zen and its culture was influenced by such a Theosophical writing or not. And whether Siren had some contact with Stephenson or other Theosophists while he stayed in Japan.